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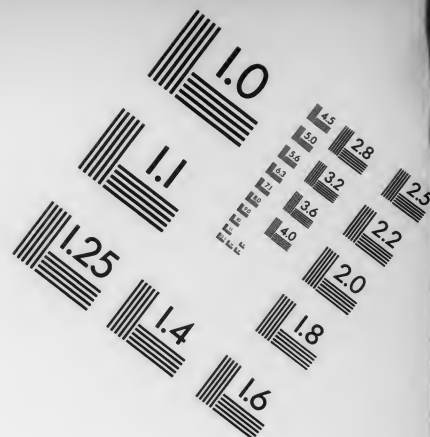
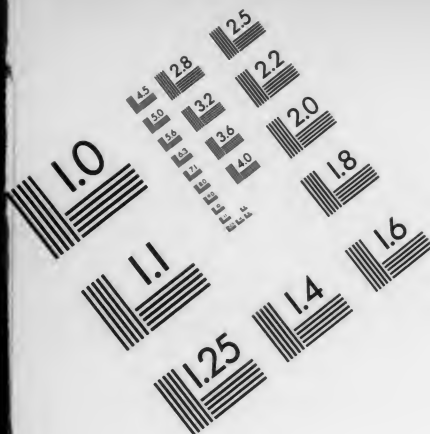


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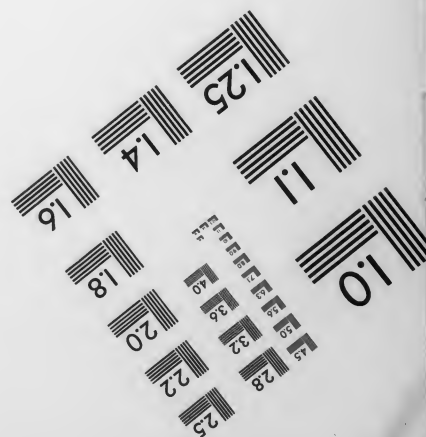
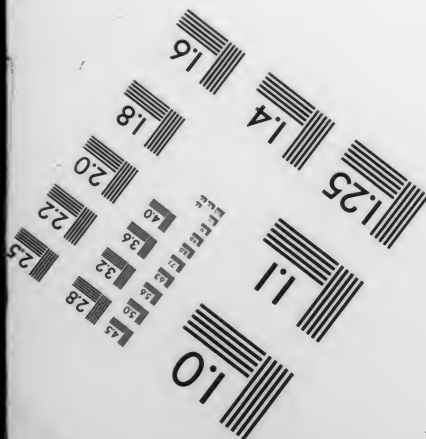
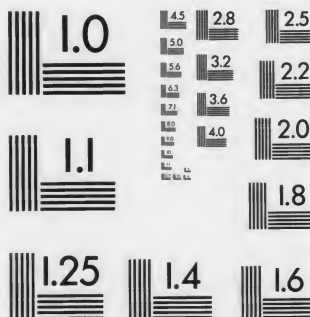
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No. 3,

# ON BAPTISM;

ITS

OBLIGATION, SUBJECTS, MODE, AND MEANING.

BY

WILLIAM ROBINSON.

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CAMBRIDGE:

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1864.

The substance of this essay was delivered as a Sermon in the Chapel, St. Andrew's Street, Cambridge, in the month of June, 1864.

The author has no better reason for printing it than the urgent request of a friend; but hopes it may be useful as a compendium.



## ON BAPTISM.

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IN the beginning of the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles the conversion of Saul is described; and afterward, the recovery of his sight by the ministry of Ananias. Three days before he had been a conscientious and most resolute and terrible persecutor. He saw his error, repented, became a Christian; and he *arose and was baptized*. One of the very earliest acts of his Christian life was his baptism. He had entered Damascus confounded, distressed, and blind. The third day found him without sight, and neither eating nor drinking. Ananias spake to him words of consolation and hope; and his sight was restored. He was still debilitated by the intense excitement and the fasting to which he had been subjected; but his first act when he could see, was an act of self-consecration. He was baptized before he ate. *He received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized*. His example, presented under the guidance of a teacher sent to him with special instructions by our Lord himself, certainly shows that in his case baptism was an act of pressing obligation and great importance; and may prompt us to seek for the true answers to the four following questions: Is baptism obligatory now? If it be, who are its proper subjects? How is it to be performed? What is its use?

### I.

Is baptism obligatory now? Our Saviour gave to his Apostles, just before his ascension, this commission: *go teach all nations, baptizing them* \* \* *to I am with you alway even unto*

*the end of the world.* The closing phrase in this commission, *the end of the world*, is almost peculiar to Matthew, and by him it is used as follows: *The harvest is the end of the world. As the tares are gathered, and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world.* It cannot be restricted to the life time of the Apostles, but comprises the entire duration of the Christian dispensation: and if so, the question as to the permanence of the rite is settled.

It may, however, be well to add, that a law, being enacted, remains in force unless it be repealed; and that there is no hint in the New Testament that baptism was designed to be a temporary rite. The Apostles always speak of it as a standing institution; and we therefore are no more at liberty to set it aside, than to affirm that repentance and faith are no longer required.

And these considerations derive additional force from the almost universal agreement among Christians as to the point in hand: so that if any one call in question the present obligation of baptism, on him rests the very grave responsibility of shewing that he is right, and that nearly all believers in all times have been wrong. On every view of the subject, the burden of proof rests with him who turns aside from these plain words, *go teach all nations baptizing them; lo I am with you alway even unto the end of the world.* Vain is it to plead that under the full revelation of Christianity we need only what is spiritual, not what is ritual. That is a point to be decided, not by the Christian, but by Christ.

## II.

Who are the proper subjects of Baptism? Those only who put on Christ, for an Apostle says *as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* Infants cannot put on Christ. Therefore infants are not to be baptized. Who then? Those who have been taught. *Go teach all nations, baptizing them.* Baptism is for disciples. A disciple who is not taught is an absurdity.

Who are the proper subjects for baptism? Believers.

*Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.* Episcopalians teach that faith is required in baptism, and therefore ask infants! whether they believe, and take the answers from sponsors: a practice having no more warrant from Scripture than has mariolatry; and which is ludicrously absurd. That even good and intelligent men can adopt this practice, and dare to dishonour Christ by connecting it with his sacred name, is, of all the mysteries of delusion, one of the greatest.

Who are to be baptized? They that gladly receive the word, as did thousands on the day of Pentecost: they that rejoice, believing in God, as did the jailor's household: they that hear the word with joy, as did the household of Cornelius: they in whom faith produces good works, as it did in the members of the household of Stephanas, who addicted themselves to the service of the saints.

There is no instance of infant baptism in the Bible; no precept enjoining it. Some parents took their infant children to Jesus. Then, if ever, might we expect to read of infant baptism, if such a practice were to be observed. The silence of scripture is an expressive proof that infant baptism is not of Christ; or, as Jeremy Taylor has shaped the argument for us, "Christ blessed children and so dismissed them, but baptized them not, therefore infants are not to be baptized."

The advocates of infant baptism will stoutly maintain that there were infants in the baptized households of scripture, though in every instance but one, language is employed which proves either that there were not, or—again to quote Taylor—that "by whole families in scripture is meant all persons of reason and age within the family; for it is said of the ruler of Capernaum, that *he believed with all his house.* Now you may also suppose that in his house were babes: that is likely enough: and you may also suppose they did believe too before they did understand, but that is not so likely."

There is however one case in which the argument for the existence of babes is irresistible. He who thinks that infants were to be found in the household of Lydia, cannot doubt that they existed in the city of Samaria. Thither went Philip and preached, and the people with one accord gave heed. There

was great joy in that city, and they were baptized *both men and women*. That some of these had young children may be esteemed certain. Were they baptized? Why then do we not read that men and women and infants were baptized? But if—as I presume we must infer—the infants were not baptized, it follows that infant baptism is not Apostolical.

Pædobaptists plead that "Abraham's offspring were received into covenant with God by the rite of circumcision." Certainly. And as circumcision, so baptism, is designed for the seed of Abraham, and none other. Who are the seed of Abraham? Not the children of believers, but believers. *Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*

Roman Catholics avow that there is no scriptural authority for infant baptism, and plead in its defence ecclesiastical authority, which they miscall "the Church." Those Protestants who defend the practice, appeal to "the Fathers." What is the testimony of "the Fathers?" There is no mention of infant baptism in the first century, nor in the second century. As nearly as can be ascertained, it had its origin in Africa about the middle of the third century, by which time gross superstitions and corrupt practice, disfigured the Christian name.

We distinguish between infants, children, youths, and adults. The Greeks and Romans of course did the same. The Greek word which covers both childhood and youth is *Paides* (Παιδες); whence our word Pædobaptism; which means, not infant baptism, but the baptism of young people. Infants are children, but children are not necessarily infants. With this distinction borne in mind we may rightly judge of the testimony of "the Fathers," which is as follows:—

Justin Martyr, A.D. 140,—I follow Lardner's dates—says, "many both men and women of sixty and seventy years of age, who have been the disciples of Christ from their youth (ἐκ παιδων), remain uncorrupted." There is not a syllable about baptism, not a syllable about infants. Yet the passage has been adduced as indicating the early existence of infant baptism, though it really tends to disprove it. Had Justin believed, as some now vainly affirm, that infants are "made Christians" in baptism, he would have said that they had been

disciples ἐκ βρεφους or ἐκ βρεφων, *i.e.* from infancy. The fact that he has not gone back to infancy, is best explained by supposing that he had never heard or thought of infant baptism.

Irenæus, A.D. 178, is cited as another witness. His works have been lost, but a Latin version of them has been preserved, which, in the part we are concerned with, has been pronounced by competent authority "execrable." He asserts that our Saviour "came to save by himself all who through him are born again to God, infants, little ones, and children, and youths, and elder persons." He does not mention baptism.

Tertullian, A.D. 200, wrote a treatise on baptism. In his day we discern the elements out of which infant baptism grew, namely, exorbitant notions of the efficacy of the rite. In chapters 8 and 15 he seems to teach that sin after baptism is fatal, and in chapter 17, that its administration should be hastened in case of the sick. From which latter notion the transition was easy to hastening baptism in the case of the young, lest they should die without it. This was done. Tertullian shows plainly that young children had been baptized, *but not infants*. He calls them *parvulos*, not *infantes*; and strongly censures the practice. He writes—see chapters 6, 13, 16—of believers' baptism: he condemns the baptism of young children: he says not a syllable about infant baptism, which had he ever heard of, his principles would have led him more strongly to condemn. The obvious and I think certain inference is, that in his day infant baptism was unknown.

A few extracts from the learned Chevalier Bunsen will corroborate these statements.

"Baptism of new born infants, with the vicarious promises of parents or their sponsors, was utterly unknown to the early church; not only down to the end of the 2nd, but indeed to the middle of the 3rd century."—*Hip.* III., p. 181.

"The difference between the ante nicene and the later church was essentially this. The later church, with the exception of converts, baptized only new born infants, and she did so on principle. The ancient church as a general rule baptized adults, and only after they had gone through the course of instruction; and, as the exception only, christian children

who had not arrived at years of maturity; but never infants."  
—*Ibid.*, p. 194.

"Cyprian, and some other African bishops, his contemporaries, at the close of the 3rd century, were the first who viewed baptism in the light of a washing away of the universal sinfulness of human nature, and connected this idea with that ordinance of the Old Testament, circumcision."\*—*Ibid.*, p. 195.

From the whole we may perceive that infant baptism has no claim to be regarded as Apostolical or Christian, but is a human invention dating from the latter part of the 3rd century: and that the proper subjects of baptism are those only who have "put on Christ."

### III.

How is the rite about which we inquire, to be administered? This inquiry branches into two. What is the meaning of the word baptize? And have we the right to alter the mode of administration? For some say baptize does not mean immerse; and others admitting that it does, contend that we are at liberty to alter the mode.

Should any one be overwhelmed by abundance of water poured on him, in my opinion he would be baptized. If any prefer submersion to immersion, let them practise it: but to raise this question in connexion with the present controversy, is mere quibbling. Two modes of administering the rite are now adopted; one is immersion, the other sprinkling: and the only practical points at issue are, which of these two modes is right, or whether both are admissible. In this part of the controversy, the Baptist enjoys an advantage not often falling to the lot of disputants; for all parties admit that immersion is baptism. We have to inquire whether sprinkling is baptism.

In addition to the examples of the word baptize by inspired men, there are one hundred and fifty-one examples in other

\* The usually candid Dr. J. P. Smith endeavours—*First Lines of Christian Theology*, p. 666—to break the force of Bunsen's argument, by shewing that the word *parvuli* is applied to infants, seeming to overlook the fact that though all children are not infants, all infants are children. Compare *Luke* 2, 43 and 18, 15 to 17.

Greek writers. These have been collected and published: and the word in question is found to mean "to immerse, immerge, submerge, to dip, to plunge, to imbathe, to whelm:" either literally; or figuratively, in affliction, debt, &c.; as when we say a man is over head and ears in debt. In no one instance does the word mean to sprinkle.

When we are in doubt about the meaning of a word, we consult dictionaries. No lexicographer would dare to forfeit the character of his book, and expose himself to the derision of scholars, by saying that baptizein means to sprinkle. All Greek dictionaries tell us that the word means to immerse; not one, that it means to sprinkle.

Is it likely, say some, that the three thousand of whom we read that they were added to the Christians on the day of Pentecost, were immersed? We reply, Luke says they were. He could have said they were sprinkled. WHY DID HE NOT SAY SO? In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told of the sprinkling of the unclean, the sprinkling of the book, &c. The word there is *rantize*, which denotes sprinkling; not baptize, which denotes immersion. If the multitude converted on the day of Pentecost were sprinkled, or if part were sprinkled and part immersed, WHY DID NOT LUKE SAY SO? It is strange that any who stand aghast at Colenso's scepticism, should hesitate to give credence to the immersion of three thousand people. To say, "it is not likely that these persons were immersed," is in effect to say, "it is not likely that Luke told the truth."

Although it may be superfluous to pursue this part of the subject further, the reader may not be uninterested in a few other relevant facts.

As early as the 2nd century, learned men began to translate the Greek Testament into other tongues: and the early versions shew that in some places the Greek word baptize was naturalized, as it is in England; but they give not the slightest sanction to aspersion or affusion, in the place of baptism. Before the end of the fifth century, nine such translations had

\* See *The meaning and use of Baptizein* by T. J. Conant, D.D., New York. The same collection of passages may also be found in *The Gospel by Matthew, &c.*, by Dr. Conant. Trübner and Co., London.

been produced. In four of these, the words in question are transferred; and in the remaining five, translated immerse; but never sprinkle. Wonderful as are the prejudice and perversion connected with the word baptize, I am not aware that any translator, in any age, has rendered it to sprinkle. How comes it to pass, if sprinkling be baptism, that this does not appear in any Bible of any age?\*

Hours might be spent in giving citations from learned Pædobaptists, in confirmation of what has been said: but a few will suffice.

## LUTHER.

"The Greek word baptism may in Latin be translated *mersio*, as when we plunge anything into water, so that it is wholly covered by the water. \* \* And although the custom may have been set aside—for they do not wholly immerse children, but only pour a very little water on them—they ought to be immersed, for so the meaning of the word requires: \* \* and truly if you consider the design of baptism, you will perceive that immersion is requisite; for it signifies that the old man and our nature full of sin is cleansed (*demergatur*) by

\* For an account of versions ancient and modern in relation to the present inquiry see *A Critical Examination, &c.*, by Dr. Gotch, reprinted in vol. xii. of *The Bunyan Library*.

If a Missionary were to go to an island tenanted by savages, reduce their language to writing, and translate for them the scriptures; and translate the word baptize as it is translated in five out of nine of the earliest versions and in all dictionaries, the British and Foreign Bible Society would not give a shilling to aid him in his work. That Society demands that in all new versions receiving its sanction, baptize and its cognate words shall be left in Greek. There are about 90 passages in which these words occur. The Society, loudly condemning the Pope for endeavouring to keep the Bible in Latin, has decreed that so far as its influence extends, those 90 passages shall not be given to the people in their own tongues. Must not that be a bad cause which forbids the translation of the words denoting one of the two sacraments of the New Covenant? Baptists could not have a more complete proof of the unfortunate position of their opponents, than is supplied by the fact that Pædobaptists cannot translate the scriptural instructions relating to baptism themselves, and will not suffer others to do it for them. Before me lies a copy of the scriptures in the Dualla or Cameroon's language. No other version in that language exists. It is said to be intelligible across the whole continent of Africa. Not because it is translated incorrectly: for no other reason than that the words relating to baptism are translated, does the Bible Society, which freely and perhaps wisely aids in circulating very objectionable Popish versions, decline to aid in the distribution of this version. I grieve to add that no Pædobaptists are heard lifting up their voice against this pitiable bigotry.

divine grace: therefore the mode of baptism ought to correspond with its signification, that the sign may be clear and complete."—Luth. de. bap.

## CALVIN.

"The word baptize signifies to immerse, and the rite of immersion was observed by the ancient church."—Cal: Ins: lib. 4, c. 15, § 19.

## DR. WALL

is the author of the ablest defence of infant baptism we possess. For his work on the subject, published in 1705, he received the thanks of convocation.

"The general and ordinary way was to baptize by immersion. \* \* This is so plain and clear by an infinite number of passages, that one cannot but pity the weak endeavours of such Pædobaptists as would maintain the negative of it."—Wall's Hist. of In. Bap. p. 462.

## JOHN WESLEY.

"Mary Welsh, aged eleven days, was baptized, according to the custom of the first church and the rule of the church of England, by immersion."—See his Journal.

## CONYBEARE AND HOWSON.

"Baptism was, unless in exceptional cases, administered by immersion, the convert being plunged beneath the surface of the water to represent his resurrection to the life of righteousness. It must be a subject of regret, that the general discontinuance of this original form of baptism—though perhaps necessary in our northern climates—has rendered obscure to popular apprehension some very important passages of Scripture."—*Life and Epis. of Paul*, vol. i., p. 471.

## JOWETT.

"The meaning of the former part of this verse—*buried with him by baptism*—will be more clearly brought out if we recal the picture of baptism in the Apostolic age, when the rite was



performed by immersion, and the passing of the Israelites through the cloud and the sea, and even the deluge itself seemed no inappropriate types of its waters. Imagine not infants, but crowds of grown up persons already changed in heart and feelings; their life seeming to themselves hidden with Christ and God, losing their very personal consciousness in the laver of regeneration; rising again from its depths into the light of heaven, in communion with God and nature; met as they rose from the bath with the white raiment, and ever after looking back on that moment as the instant of their new birth."—*The Epistles, &c.*, by Benj. Jowett, M.A., vol. ii., p. 171.

#### STANLEY.

"There can be no question that the original form of baptism—the very meaning of the word—was complete immersion in the deep baptismal waters; and that for at least four centuries, any other form was either unknown, or regarded as an exceptional, almost a monstrous case."—*Eastern Churches*, p. 34.

"No common spring or tank would meet the necessities of the multitudes who came to John, confessing their sins. The Jordan now seemed to have met with its fit purpose. \* \* There began that sacred rite, which has since spread throughout the world, through the vast baptistries of the southern and oriental churches, gradually dwindling to the little fonts of the north and west; the plunges beneath the water diminishing to the few drops which, by a wise exercise of Christian freedom, are now in most churches the sole representative of the full stream of the descending river."—Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine*, pp. 312 and 314.

The popular opinion is that the practice of sprinkling, as a common mode of administering the Christian rite, is of very high antiquity. How far that opinion is justified, let the reader of the following lines judge.

In the 8th century some of the clergy in France had adopted that mode in cases of urgency. The Pope having been compelled to take refuge in that country, was consulted on the subject; and he replied that if in cases of necessity, baptism were performed by pouring water from the hand, or a cup, it

should be valid:\* and that is probably the earliest *public* authority for the practice, that can be adduced. As it was found convenient, there arose danger of its too frequent adoption. Hence council after council passed decrees forbidding it, unless under the pressure of necessity. Thus a council held in England in the year 816 said,—

"Let the Presbyters also know when they administer baptism, that they may not pour the holy water over the infant's head; but let them always be immersed in the font, as the Son of God furnished by himself an example to every believer when he was thrice immersed in the waves of the Jordan."

Proofs that immersion continued to be the authorized rite may be found down to the 15th or 16th century by consulting Wilkins's *Concilia*.† In this country sprinkling was not authorized in common practice, till after the reformation. The first prayer book of Edward VI. required immersion. He himself and Queen Elizabeth were immersed. The Presbyterians were the great advocates of sprinkling; and so late as the year 1705, Dr. Wall denounced it in terms so strong that had they been written by a Baptist, I would not have cited them:—

"As for sprinkling, I say let them defend it who use it. They are hardly prevailed on to leave off the scandalous custom of having their children, though never so well, baptised out of a basin or porrenger, in a bed chamber; hardly persuaded to bring them to church, much further from having them dipped, though never so well able to bear it."

The first warrant for sprinkling on ordinary occasions was, I believe, given during the reign of Cromwell, when the Presbyterians carried the point by a majority of 25 to 24.

The conclusion from the whole enquiry is clear. *Sprinkling is not baptism.*

It is however still open to us to ask, whether it be not lawful to alter the mode, a question of great urgency wherever baptism is held to be necessary to salvation; for, as many cases occur in which immersion might be death to a new born infant whose life hangs in doubt, it is manifest that sprinkling has, if lawful,

\* Robinson's *History of Baptism*, p. 429.

† e.g. Vol. i., pp. 505, 606. Vol. ii. pp. 131, 293.

very strong recommendations. Thus was it, as we have seen, that the practice originated; and very curious and altogether disgusting are the ecclesiastical rules given for the administration of the rite, under circumstances, to which decency forbids further allusion.\*

In the present day, without the pretence which once existed, the plea is still maintained that a change in the mode is lawful. To this the Baptist demurs. He does not think it wise or modest to alter, even under pretext of improving, an institution of Christ. Undoubtedly his own practice involves some inconvenience. He does not deem himself at liberty to shrink from that inconvenience. Nor do the reasons assigned by Pædobaptists for altering a divine ordinance, satisfy his judgment. Water, it is said, is symbolical of spiritual purity, whether much or little be used. We grant, of course, that baptism is a sign. Divine wisdom has manifested itself in the appointment of a most significant sign of thorough spiritual cleansing; namely, a washing with water. The sprinkling a few drops of water is a much less significant sign. Why should we set aside Christ's sign, and prefer one of far less force? After all, the main consideration is, what our Saviour has enjoined. Our wisdom lies in obeying his commands, not in discussing them. He has said, "Be baptized;" and *sprinkling is not baptism*.

While we dare not depart from the plain instructions of our Lord and his Apostles, and for the sake of convenience adopt an ordinance of man, we readily admit that the end is more important than the means; the purpose of baptism more important than the mode. Let us therefore devote careful attention to the last point of inquiry.

#### IV.

*What is the use of Baptism? What mean ye by this service?*

1. Is regeneration by or in baptism?

Episcopalians reply that in baptism we are born again. It is needless to quote from the book of Common Prayer in proof: sufficient thus to refer to it. All clergymen whose creed is consistent with their solemn professions, and with their position,

\* See the instructions to priests de baptizandis parvulis in the preface to the *Rituale Romanum*.

hold this view. "It is in the font," says Alford, commenting on Titus iii. 5, "and when we are in it, that the first breath of the new life is drawn." Beyond a doubt multitudes believe this; and if it be a scriptural truth, no language can overrate its importance.

It is but the part of candour to confess that similar views have the sanction of very high antiquity. The argument from "the Fathers" to baptismal regeneration, is far stronger than the argument from that source in favour of either infant sprinkling, or infant baptism: and would be very difficult to deal with, were it not notorious that the same sanction may be pleaded for almost all perversions of Christian truth and Christian practice; for example, for infant communion, in which custom the ancients were not without some pretext; for the same authority which says, *except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*, says also, *Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you*. If the one passage apply to infants, so must the other; and if the former be interpreted of baptism, the latter will of course be interpreted of the Lord's Supper: and then we reach the very curious inference, that none of the millions of baptized infants find the new life in the font, because none of them have received the Eucharist; without which, according to the theories of sacramentarians, they cannot have it.

Little do Christians in general conceive how wholly worthless for purposes of guidance is the example of the early churches.

To enter into detail would involve a digression of very inconvenient length, the necessity for which may be avoided by presenting two or three sentences from the pen of Isaac Taylor.

"The history of Christianity! alas the ominous words sink like a mortal chill into the heart. \* \* \* Pages, and pages again, may be adduced from writers of the second and third century, which, suppressing names and incidental allusions, an intelligent reader might easily suppose to have been taken from those of the twelfth or thirteenth century. \* \* \* The opinion that has forced itself on my own mind, is to this effect,

that the period dating its commencement from the death of the last of the Apostles, or Apostolic men, was, altogether as little deserving to be selected and proposed as a *pattern*, as any one of the first five of church history."—*Ancient Christianity*, pp. 18, 65, 106.

Besides referring to "the Fathers"—as with much force they may—the advocates of baptismal regeneration appeal to Scripture; and we must examine this appeal, for if baptized infants have so great an advantage over others—of which however there is somehow in actual life a total lack of evidence—who would not eagerly, at so cheap a rate, secure regeneration for them?

The rite appointed for the seed of Abraham was circumcision. To him, it was a *seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised*, but not to his infant offspring: nor did they become new creatures by the rite. *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the commandments of God.* Nevertheless, that rite was referred to as representing the need and the nature of regeneration. *Circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked. Circumcision is that of the heart.* The Jews thought the uncircumcised unclean, and themselves clean. They have their successors in those who say, "It is in the font, and when we are in it, that the first breath of the new life is drawn."

Baptism is to those who believe an edifying rite; but if administered to infants, has no more moral efficacy on them than circumcision had: and quite vainly therefore do some infer, from instructive allusions to it, that the new birth is in the baptistry. Paul says—Titus iii. 5—that God in his grace saves us by the bath of regeneration, not the bath of baptism. As circumcision was not in the letter but in the spirit, so the baptism that saves is the baptism of the heart, not of the flesh: which view is strongly confirmed, by the only other part of the New Testament in which this laver or bath is mentioned. *Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might cleanse it by the laver of water* BY THE WORD: not, as the learned critic named above strangely imagines, the word which the administrator of baptism pronounces, but as Peter teaches

us *the incorruptible seed, the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.* Indeed Alford, with his usual admirable honesty—always to be more relied on than his judgment—has explained the words cited above from the Epistle to the Ephesians, in a manner that seems to me fatal to his notion of new life begun in the font.

"*The word* preached and received is the conditional element of purification, the real water of spiritual baptism, that wherein and whereby alone the efficacy of baptism is conveyed, that wherein and whereby we are regenerated."

Beyond controversy, both Peter and Paul teach us that we are born again by the word of God. Therefore, infants, who are not capable of receiving the word of God, are not born again in baptism.

Nor certainly is it true of adults, that the first breath of the new life is drawn in the baptistry; as their own consciousness proves. On this point, Baptists are the most competent witnesses; and their experience corresponds with that of apostolic times. *As many as received his word were baptized.* The reception of the regenerating word, the first breath of the new life, was previous to baptism, not in baptism. Of the Samaritans it is said, that WHEN THEY BELIEVED, *they were baptized both men and women.* Baptism was the expression of the faith, the new life, which they had, being unbaptized. Paul received the first breath of the new life before he entered into Damascus, and was baptized three days afterward. So clearly does Scripture teach us that baptism is for persons already regenerated, not the act in which we draw the first breath of the new life.

The words by which Episcopalians are most bewildered, are those addressed by our Lord to Nicodemus, *except a man be born of water, and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* They read, or at least interpret them thus, except a man be baptized, he cannot enter the kingdom of God: whereas, as Calvin suggests, the two clauses descriptive of the birth are but the figurative and literal account of one and the same thing. To be born of water means to be born not only of a new but a holy birth, of which change the Holy Spirit is



the author: as the most High said by the prophet, *I will pour water on him that is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground*; and then added the explanation of the metaphor, *I will pour my spirit on thy seed, and my blessing on thine offspring*. To be born of water is one thing, to be baptized another. That believers are born of water, that is by a holy birth; that they are born of the spirit, that they are regenerated by the word of God, are scriptural sentiments: that we are born again in baptism, is a dangerous delusion, like that of the Jews, who thought they were holy by circumcision.

## 2. Is baptism a public profession of Christianity?

For Baptists have been much accustomed to represent it as a profession of religion, which the believer makes to the world, and to regard this as its one primary purpose. But if it be, why was the rite often observed under circumstances at variance with its very design? On that hypothesis, Candace's treasurer should have been required to return to Jerusalem to be baptized; and Saul should have waited till an assembly of the Damascenes could be summoned to witness his baptism; and the Philippian jailor should not have been baptized in the night. Nowhere is it said or hinted that Christians were to be baptized as a proclamation to the world of their discipleship; nowhere in the Bible do we read of confessing Christ by baptism; nor indeed is there one clear instance of public baptism in the whole of the New Testament: for the multitudes who went to John in the wilderness were all candidates for the ordinance he administered. It will be allowed that the Christian ordinance of water should follow speedily on conversion; but neither reason nor Scripture teaches that it becomes one, young perhaps in years, and in Christ a babe, to summon the world to witness his zeal for the Lord of Hosts. Such a step seems inconsistent with the modesty and diffidence which become the neophyte. If the converted man can bear the presence of spectators with equanimity, I know not why he should shrink from the gaze of the universe; and certainly the effect of the public baptism of believers is so profound and hallowed, that I should be glad always to administer it in the presence of a multitude; but I can find no evidence that

publicity is involved in the meaning and design of this ordinance.

## 3. Is baptism a condition of Church membership?

When the Jewish Christians understood not that Gentiles were to have a community of privileges with themselves, the point was settled thus: *God gave them the like gift, as he did unto us; who was I, that I should withstand God?* If Peter's reasoning be valid, for us to reject any whom we believe that God has received, is to withstand God. God hath received them, therefore we must. Such, from that time, was the Divine and revealed law of Christendom. When at a later date the question was disturbing the Church at Antioch, it was settled by precisely the same principle: *God who knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us, and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God?* To shut out those whose hearts God has purified by faith is to tempt God. When a question arose about distinction of meats and days, still the same principle was adduced by the Apostle, as decisive of the whole matter. *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye \* \* for God hath received him.* Yet thousands of Baptist Churches have made baptism a test of Christian fellowship; refusing to receive any of their fellow disciples, however manifestly their hearts have been purified by faith, unless they would conform to our views of baptism. In so doing, they have judged the servants of the Lord; and surrounded themselves with a wall of schism: indeed there are few more painful studies, than the study of the grievous perversion to which the two ordinances of the new covenant have been subjected. After the lofty tone which Baptists have assumed in relation to other points of the controversy—and I think lawfully assumed—it is humiliating to confess, that respecting the very design of the sacred rite, we have been greatly in error; but God forbid that we should be unwilling to reconsider our opinions, and amend our ways and our doings.

## 4. What then is the design of Baptism?

It is, I conceive, a transaction, not between a regenerated man and the world, nor between him and his fellow disciples,

but between him and God. Evangelical Pædobaptists generally regard it as an act of dedication. I think they are right, except that they should regard it as an act of self-dedication.

Almost all the important transactions of life have some seal or ratification; and after the ratification is completed, we feel that by that overt act the decisive step has been taken, the final pledge given: and that overt act is generally made to represent the chief obligations and advantages of the transaction, be it what it may.

Thus, when a king comes to the throne there is the coronation, a complex and gorgeous ceremonial, the design of which however is simple, namely, to mark and ratify the compact or relation between the king and his subjects. The sceptre is an emblem of his dominion; the champion of his purpose to withstand all the enemies of his government; the dove of the admixture of gentleness with justice, &c.; but quite in harmony with the varied symbolism is the one design of the whole.

A young man is converted to God. He still lives in a dangerous world, and is himself weak. Nature dictates that, guarding against all double-mindedness, he should solemnly pledge himself to the Lord he has been taught to adore and love; that he may ever afterwards feel that he has passed the Rubicon, and it is not for him to draw back or hesitate. This pledge some Christians have aimed at by a written covenant drawn up in most solemn words, perhaps signed, as in the case of Samuel Pearce, with their own blood; or it may be, renewed on their knees once a year. Baptism is the divinely appointed mode of such self-surrender. Baptized into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, the young convert gives himself to God in Christ. His baptism is a solemn vow; of all vows, the most solemn.

And that vow is taken in a manner exceedingly expressive and instructive. The name of the sacred Three, brings before him the whole truth of the Gospel; the water represents holiness, without which his profession is vain; the washing with water, the entireness of sanctity at which he is to aim; the immersion and emersion, his being buried to sin and rising to

newness of life; and the voluntariness of the whole is in strict accordance with the inward and spiritual grace, on which its efficacy depends. *Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.*

Have we given ourselves to God in baptism? Let us remember the vows of God which are upon us.

Have we entertained other views of the mode, subjects, or meaning of this rite than those now presented? May not the whole subject require from us diligent, humble, and devout re-investigation? Not pleasant surely can be the thought of going into another world, having in this, through carelessness or prejudice, failed to understand one of the two rites of the New Covenant. *Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.*

I can imagine many a reader of these pages rendered uncomfortable by them. May God help us to be honest and wise, to his own praise and our happiness. Amen.

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